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ABSTRACT

Fifty-six bidialectical rural Hawaiian children participated in a study to determine whether they possessed comparable communicative competence in both dialects (Hawaiian-Creole English and standard English). The subjects, selected from kindergarten, first, third, and sixth grades, worked in groups of two to complete a communication task. Half of the students performed the task in Hawaiian-Creole English (Pidgin), and half in standard English. The results show that older children performed better than younger children. This improved performance seemed to be the result of greater skill in Pidgin usage. Two interesting findings were the low rate of idiosyncratic responding on the part of first graders and the fact that sixth graders committed fewer errors when the task was conducted in Pidgin. (FL)

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Technical Report # 73

A Preliminary Investigation of Communication Skills Among Rural Hawaiian Children [1]

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The Kamehameha Early Education Program (KEEP) is a research and development program of The Kamehameha Schools/Bernice P. Bishop Estate. The mission of KEEP is the development, demonstration, and dissemination of methods for improving the education of Hawaiian and Part-Hawaiian children. These activities are conducted at the Ka Na'i Pono Research and Demonstration School, and in public classrooms in cooperation with the State Department of Education. KEEP projects and activities involve many aspects of the educational process, including teacher training, curriculum development, and child motivation, language, and cognition. More detailed descriptions of KEEP's history and operations are presented in Technical Reports #1-4.

Technical Report # 73

A Preliminary Investigation of Communication Skills Among Rural Hawaiian Children

Tom Ciborowski D. Price-Williams

A characteristic feature of almost every schoolchild in Hawaii is that he possesses some degree of verbal skill in a dialect of the English language commonly referred to as Pidgin (or Hawaiian-Creole English). In the present paper we will adopt the current linguistic convention of viewing Pidgin and Standard English (S.E.) as merely different dialects of the English language, with no implication that one dialect is in any way linguistically "inferior" to the other (cf. Ciborowski & Choy, 1974). Unfortunately, some schoolteachers in Hawaii (particularly those trained in the Continental United States) view Pidgin fluency as an impediment to the acquisition of fluency in S.E., as well as a hindrance to learning other school subjects. There are, in fact, several programs in Hawaii (e.g., Hawaii-English Program) specially tailored to teach S.E. to children that are fluent in Pidgin. The authors view such programs with something of a skeptical eye, and although we cannot elaborate on this skepticism here, the reader is urged to consult: Ciborowski, 1974; Day, 1975; and Cazden, John, and Hymes, 1972.

In the present paper we seek to draw a distinction between linguistic competence and what, following Krauss and Glucksberg (1970), we will term communicative competence (cf. Cazden, 1967). Earlier research has shown that by the fifth grade Hawaiian schoolchildren are bidialectical, possessing linquistic competence in both S.E. and Pidgin (Ciborowski & Choy, 1974; Gallimore & Tharp, Technical Report # 59). There is also some evidence that

this pattern of bidialecticalism extends downward to include the first four grade levels as well as kindergarten (Gallimore & Tharp, op. cit.). Research currently in progress should shed further light on this question.

Leaving aside for the moment, the issue of linguistic competence in both S.E. and Pidgin, we are confronted with the question of whether Hawaiian schoolchildren possess comparable communicative competence in both Pidgin and S.E.? In an effort to address this question we used an experimental paradigm patterned after Krauss and Glucksberg (1970) and conducted the testing in both Pidgin and S.E. The basic paradigm consists of separating two children by an opaque screen and designating one child as the Speaker and the other child as the Listener. The Speaker is presented with a series of abstract stimuli (one at a time) and he must communicate to the Listener (who has all the stimuli before him) which particular stimulus item the Speaker is describing. This procedure provides an assessment of both the receptive and productive aspects of communication. The exact procedure and stimuli used are completely described later in this paper.

Method

Subjects

A total of 56 children from Hookena School on the Big Island of Hawaii participated in the experiment. The subjects were randomly selected from the following grades: kindergarten, 1st, 3rd, and 6th. The children came from a rural fishing village (Milolii) and a more complete description of the children can be found in Ciborowski and Price-Williams (Technical Report X-1).

Design

The Ss were distributed among experimental conditions as follows: Grade (K, 1st, 3rd, 6th) x Dialect (Pidgin/Standard English). That is, half the Ss from each grade level performed the task in Pidgin and the remaining half in S.E. The experiment was a repeated measures design in that each pair of Ss in

each condition performed the task a total of three times.

Stimuli

The basic stimuli consisted of six abstract shapes adapted from those used by Krauss and Glucksberg (1970). The property they have in common is their low codeability (Brown & Lanneberg, 1954). These shapes are shown in Figure 1.

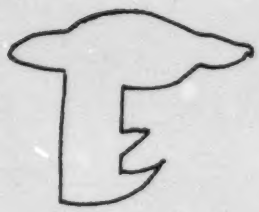
In the Krauss and Glucksberg (1970) study, pictures of the above shapes were attached to wooden blocks. In the present experiment, the shapes were cut out of a stiff black plastic sheet. Two identical groups of the six shapes were constructed. One set was used for the Speaker and one set for the Listener.

Procedure

Two children were brought to the testing location and one child was randomly designated as the Speaker and the other child as the Listener. The Speaker was told that he would be given some things one at a time and that his job was to describe the things as accurately as possible to the Listener. The Listener was told to listen carefully to the Speaker, and to ask as many questions of the Speaker as he wished, since his job was to pick out of the six things that were in front of him the particular thing that the Speaker was describing. Both the Speaker and the Listener heard all of the above instructions, and to insure that they understood their respective tasks, the experiment was conducted twice using pictures of familiar things (e.g., cat, girl, wagon, etc.). No child had difficulty in understanding the procedure of the experiment.

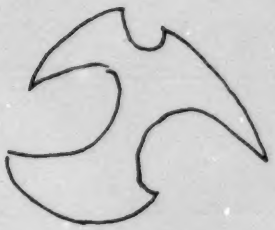
Figure 1

Stimuli Used in the Communication Task[a]



1

2



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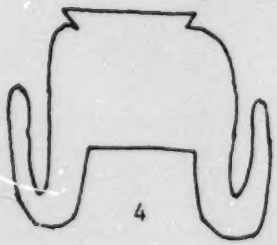

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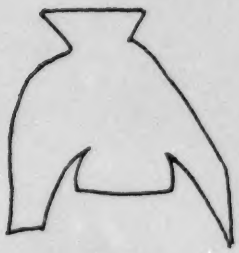

6

[a] The first, second, fourth and fifth designs are identical to those used by Krauss & Glucksberg (1970). The third and sixth were somewhat altered so that they could be cut out of a thick black plastic sheet.

The above instructions were first written in Standard English and then translated into Pidgin. Half of the Ss performed the task in Standard English and the remaining half in Pidgin. The Ss in the S.E. dialect condition were instructed to speak only in S.E., and Ss in the Pidgin dialect condition were instructed to speak only in Pidgin.

Results

The primary measure of performance was the number of errors committed by the Listener. To a degree, error scores offered a rough measure of the receptive skills in communication. The number of idiosyncratic responses on the part of the speaker were also tabulated and these offered a measure of the productive skills in communication.

An analysis of variance[1] of the error data revealed a significant main effect for grade, $F(3,76) = 4.73$, $p < .01$. A series of Newman-Keuls tests revealed that the 6th graders committed significantly fewer errors than the kindergarteners ($q(4,21) = 5.32$, $p < .01$), the 1st graders ($q(3,24) = 3.60$, $p < .05$), and the 3rd graders ($q(2,24) = 3.25$, $p < .05$). There were no other significant differences between the different grade levels.

Analysis revealed no other significant effects, but the grade by dialect interaction approached significance, $F(3,76) = 2.01$, $p < .11$. The interaction is shown in Table 1.

Inspection of the data in Table 1 at the lower grades showed that the children tended to commit fewer errors when the task was conducted in S.E., while for the 6th graders a reversed pattern was obtained. A Mann-Whitney U

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[1]We are indebted to Professor John Digman for indicating the most appropriate error term to be used in the analysis.

Table 1

Mean Errors as a Function of

Dialect and Grade Level

	Dialect	
	Standard English	Pidgin
Grade		
K	4.1	4.4
1st	3.0	4.2
3rd	3.6	3.3
6th	3.0	1.9

test revealed that for the 6th graders significantly fewer errors were committed when the task was conducted in Pidgin than in S.E., $U(12,12) = 42$, $p < .05$.

In terms of idiosyncratic responses, which provide a measure of the productive skills in communication, an analysis of variance revealed that only the grade factor proved significant, $F(3,76) = 11.86$, $p < .01$. A series of Newman-Keuls tests revealed that the 6th graders made significantly fewer idiosyncratic responses than the kindergartners ($q(4,18) = 7.29$, $p < .01$) and the 3rd graders ($q(3,24) = 4.34$), but not the first graders. The 1st graders made significantly fewer idiosyncratic responses than the kindergartners but not the 3rd graders, $q(3,18) = 6.08$, $p < .01$.

Discussion

The present experiment represents the first of a series of studies aimed at assessing the communicative and linguistic skills of a group of rural Hawaiian children that predominantly speak Pidgin when they are not in a formal classroom setting. Hence, any firm conclusions based on the results of the present study must be viewed with caution.

Overall, it was not surprising that in general the older children performed better in the experimental task. Several findings, however, seemed surprising. One such finding was the low rate of idiosyncratic responding on the part of the 1st graders. Although the difference just missed significance, the 1st graders made fewer idiosyncratic responses than the 3rd graders (mean responses of 0.83 vs. 1.63). This dip in a pattern of performance which we expected to be a monotonic sequence is difficult to explain. In terms of the Piagetian notion of egocentric speech, this finding is particularly difficult to explain, if not embarrassing. The second surprising finding was that for the 6th graders, fewer errors were committed when the task was conducted in Pidgin than when it was conducted in Standard English. This pattern of performance is the exact reverse of the pattern

observed for Ss in a free-recall memory task reported in an earlier technical report in this series. This may indicate that the two different paradigms, free-recall and communication, are tapping different psychological and cognitive processes. It remains for future research to attempt to specify the ways in which particular skills and processes are brought to bear in particular experimental paradigms (cf. Cole & Scribner, 1974).

We view the findings of the present study as tentative and expect that further studies in this series will illuminate some of the obtained findings.

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